

Jones' Jolly

It was 34 years ago that I first became aware of a potential expedition to Borneo. The idea appeared in a 1991 EO brochure as a *possible* new route—no more than a suggestion, intended to whet the appetite rather than promise anything concrete.

At the time, I was in Southeast Asia, taking a break after several years on the road as a driver. I made a short side trip to Borneo with a friend, partly to see the place for myself, partly to absorb something of its culture and language, and partly—though I wouldn't have articulated it as such—to place myself closer to whatever might develop.

EO headquarters at 267 Old Brompton Road was, for many, an introduction to a different way of thinking about travel. The ground floor was dominated by a large world map marked with coloured dots showing the reach of EO expeditions and Brief Encounters across the globe. It was quietly impressive for its time.

This was the 1980s. Most people were only just exchanging Butlin's for a week in Spain. EO's map—and the brochure that accompanied it—suggested something altogether different: travel that was direct, unpolished, and occasionally uncomfortable. It looked more like *National Geographic* than a holiday catalogue, and implied a lifetime of journeys yet to be made. That the company had begun in 1963 or 1964 was, even then, faintly remarkable.

The individual responsible for all this, for EO participants at least, was ALJ or Tony Jones et al, the founder.

Until early 1992, my own contact with Mr Jones had been limited. I had met him briefly at the Workshop and seen him intermittently during the week-long visa duty that formed part of EO training. This involved spending long hours outside various consulates—most memorably the Russian embassy—obtaining participant visas for journeys such as the Trans-Siberian. At the time it felt mildly tedious; in retrospect, it was a useful introduction to the bureaucratic realities of overland travel, albeit experienced from the relative comfort of a functioning capital city.

When I returned from Southeast Asia, Tony posed a few general questions about Borneo. I was happy to share what little I knew and to be of assistance where I could.

The back story —it emerged that a small travel operator had approached EO/Tony about sharing trips. Only one of their routes held any real interest for Tony: Borneo.

In the end, Jones decided EO would attempt to create its own journey. As a result, Borneo appeared in a 1991 brochure not as a confirmed departure, but as something under consideration—present, but unresolved.

Over a series of informal conversations with Tony—often conducted in front of the large wall map—and discussions with other staff at Brompton Road, it became clear that this proposal carried more weight than usual, insofar as *usual* applied at EO. The journey being contemplated was into the interior of Borneo and, more specifically, it would coincide with Tony's 50th year.

That inevitably raised the question of what might constitute a suitable way to mark such an occasion.

My thoughts settled on the idea of a south-to-north axis crossing of Borneo. As far as I could determine, there had been no recorded axis attempt pre or post the Indonesia–Malaysia Confrontation of 1961–66. In practical terms, such a crossing was not permitted at the time and remains prohibited by both Indonesian and Malaysian authorities whose territories Borneo falls within.

One evening, standing in front of the ground-floor map, and indicating the proposed stages I outlined the concept to Tony. He listened without comment. There was a long pause while he considered it.As CEO, he could have kiboshed the idea immediately; after all the journey could never be repeated, let alone offered commercially.

Eventually,the silence.. was broken with a chuckle.
I had my answer.....
Jones' Jolly had begun..... tbc..

The epitome of the ultimate fair dinkum adventurer, . The adventure itself was the point, and why so many of us were privileged to be a part of it.....and I was one of them.



A photo of Tony Jones & Ian Stevenson in Borneo.

Shortly after this image was captured In the heart of the dense, emerald rainforest of Borneo, Tony, Ian & I found ourselves in a precarious situation after stumbling upon a forbidden zone ruled by a powerful Chinese logging firm.

Shortly thereafter our freedom of movement was halted, our passports seized, we were summoned to a clandestine meeting with an enigmatic figure I monikered as 'Mr. Big,' the intimidating Chinese head of the timber mafia, who could easily pass as the lead villain in a James Bond movie. And then it hit me - this wasn't a movie, this was a real deal arch criminal which actors strive to imitate.

The tension in the air was palpable as Tony entered a creaky wooden boardroom, where Mr. Big sat at the opposite side of a wide, imposing table, exuding an aura of authority and ruthlessness....our passports laid out before him.

Ian & I took positions on a single bench at the rear – close to the exit... I noted the scene before me and contemplated even Cubby Broccoli couldn't have set the backdrop more perfectly, A huge Map of Borneo filled the space behind 'Mr Big', various colours carefully plotted the sinister ambitions of his remit.

As the meeting commenced, an unforgettable silent yet intense standoff unfolded between Tony and Mr. Big, each sizing up the other with calculated gaze. The weight of the impending negotiations hung heavy in the air, the stakes high and the outcome uncertain. Time seemed to stretch on endlessly as the two men locked eyes in a battle of wills, their unspoken words echoing in the silence of the room.

In a surprising twist of fate, Tony's innate diplomatic skills and quick thinking proved to be the key to our freedom. Through a series of strategic moves, which involved the destruction of all audio visual evidence of our illegal crossing from Indonesian to Malaysian Borneo* and carefully crafted negotiations based around our legal Malaysian entry stamp, a resolution was reached that allowed us to depart the territory unscathed, our passports returned and our freedom restored.

I have to say that was one of the highlights for me. For what seemed like an eternity, Tony and Mr. Big stared each other down without uttering a single word. The silence was deafening. Nice one Tony!

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The final word, as always, must go to Tony:

*In fact Glen did NOT wipe the tell-tale movie tape as we had agreed but fooled Mr Big into thinking there was nothing on it. And fooled me too.

It was the same Baker's Balls of Brass that had come up with the original brilliant, convoluted notion of the trip (known as Jones' Jolly celebrating my 50th) crossing in-out-in-out of Malaysian/Indonesian - Borneo with Bonafide visas but with only one (Malaysian) entry stamp - plus dozens of other incredible tales but only one that's illustrated. It's the one above.

A really great picture of Ian and I - great that is until one factors-in the instruction from Glen "it would look more gung-ho if you two were to kneel down"!